

# Community Learning and Development Progress Visit Report

**East Ayrshire Council**

19 December 2023

## 1. Context

HM Inspectors visited East Ayrshire Council to undertake a community learning and development (CLD) progress visit during November 2023. During the visit, we talked to learners and community representatives, CLD leaders, managers, staff, and volunteers, and other key stakeholders. HM Inspectors evaluated the effectiveness of local authority CLD partnerships' approach to self-evaluation and planning for improvement, and considered progress made against identified priorities in their CLD plans.

## 2. Findings from the progress visit

### How effective is the leadership of the local authority and their CLD partners in improving outcomes?

#### Areas of positive progress

Leadership of CLD (referred to as Vibrant Communities) is strong and effective. Their vision for improvement is clear, with partners reporting that the CLD approach is impacting positively on the way they deliver services. Stakeholders value the approach of CLD staff and are clear about how it contributes to achieving joint priorities. Arrangements for governance of CLD are well established. East Ayrshire Council has robust reporting arrangements and CLD performance is scrutinised regularly. Reporting by the Head of Housing and Communities to elected members ensures that officers are held to account. East Ayrshire Council continues to maintain its strong performance and focus on continuous improvement. The CLD Framework for 2012-24 sets out how the ambitions of the Community Plan for East Ayrshire will be achieved. CLD activity is well-embedded in the Community Plan under three main thematic areas; economy and skills, safer communities and wellbeing. However, the actions in the CLD Framework would benefit from being more measurable so that partners and staff can see where their work contributes to improving outcomes.

Community members and young people are active participants in CLD planning and decision-making. Young people across East Ayrshire are supported well to have a say in how services are delivered. Youth Cabinet members contribute to decision-making processes at a council level. Elected members and senior officers seek and value their opinions. The process of developing local Community Action Plans ensures that communities contribute to setting local priorities that are relevant to their needs. Council for Voluntary Organisations East Ayrshire has strong links with community planning partners and is a key delivery organisation within the council area. The council's Workforce Strategy demonstrates a strong commitment to growing and developing staff. Leaders of Vibrant Communities support staff effectively, helping them take responsibility for their own learning. Trust placed in frontline staff by managers allows them to deliver effectively in their roles. Staff have the autonomy to make decisions for the benefit of the groups and communities they work with.

The capacity of CLD to deliver on its key priorities is strengthened by a wide range of external funding. This has enhanced their ability to deliver programmes to learners and communities. The innovative use of budgets has allowed Vibrant Communities to create new temporary posts to tackle inequalities. The Vibrant Communities approach to engagement is leading the way across the council. As a result, council departments and partner agencies are engaging more effectively with communities to shape policy and services at a local level.

#### Areas for development

Vibrant Communities and their partners should consider producing a separate CLD Plan for 2024-27. This would help to ensure that the full picture of CLD delivery is captured and that the connections between CLD priorities in the Community Plan and Community Action Plans are more transparent. They should also consider the implications of many posts being funded by external temporary sources. Whilst this has undoubtedly added capacity to the core staffing complement, sustainability in the longer term may present a challenge. Part-time staff and volunteers would benefit from additional pathways towards CLD qualifications.

## How well does the performance of the local authority and their CLD partners demonstrate positive impact?

### Areas of positive progress

CLD partners demonstrate a good understanding of the socio-economic circumstances of local people. Overall, data is used well to plan and evaluate their work. East Ayrshire Council has a clear commitment to reducing inequality and addressed need in its Strategic Plan for 2022-27. Programmes are planned well to respond to the needs of communities facing disadvantage. Data gathered by Vibrant Communities for the National CLD Key Performance Indicators return is used effectively to inform future planning. Whilst some measures have not returned to pre-COVID-19 levels, several measures demonstrate an upward trend. For example, the number of adults gaining wider achievement awards has increased substantially since 2021-22.

The Local Employability Partnership provides clear strategic direction across a wide range of partners. Robust use of local and national data ensures that key priorities are actioned. No One Left Behind funding is supporting the delivery of a good range of employability programmes and projects for the over and under 25-year-olds. The 2022 figure of 97% for positive school leaver destinations is the highest ever recorded in East Ayrshire. The SL33 hub is making a significant contribution to helping young people achieve a positive destination upon leaving school. Using intelligence gathered, partners are effectively supporting those young people who currently do not progress on to higher education. This is leading to a renewed focus on developing skills and vocational pathways.

CLD partners demonstrate a strong commitment to working with those individuals and communities facing disadvantage. Barriers to participation are reducing as a result. Care experienced young people achieve well through a range of opportunities. A few are gaining accreditation through Saltire Awards and sports coaching. Young people attending SL33 are achieving well. Attendance is high and partners work together well to support young people including those with additional support needs. Robust planning at an individual level is leading to young people progressing to training and gaining employment.

Homelink Workers support families very well. Those attending Parental Empowerment groups are now less socially isolated. Parents are shaping their learning and taking more control of their lives. Several parents are progressing to college and volunteering because of their involvement. Across partners, almost all learner progress is tracked through individual learning plans. The successful Me2U eight-week employability programme offers placements in schools for roles such as janitorial, cleaning and catering. Most learners completing the programme move on to paid employment. Participants in a range of programmes can now apply their knowledge and skills in different settings. For example, English speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners can now converse in English and have a better understanding of health and education structures. Participants in Challenging Health, Arts, Movement, Play & Sports programme and

Healthy Active Rehabilitation programme are reaching their goals whilst contributing well to their communities.

### Areas for development

Adult learning partners should continue with their plans to learn from the ESOL model and develop a pan-Ayrshire coordinated approach to community-based adult learning. This should include local community organisations not yet included in the partnership.

### 3. Practice worth sharing more widely

During the progress visit, we identified aspects of highly effective practice which we would like to explore further. The strength of the influence of young people in Community Planning structures and their influence in improving the lives of young people in East Ayrshire

The positive impact of SL33 alternative education provision in improving life chances for young people.

### 4. What happens next?

The local authority and their CLD partners are making sufficient progress with their CLD plan and have the capacity to continue to improve. As a result, HM Inspectors will take no further action in relation to this progress visit.

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19 December 2023